

# Office of the Attorney General



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## **Statement by Attorney General Terry Goddard on Colorado City**

Thank you for coming this afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you what the Attorney General's office has been done with regard to Colorado City.

I am proud of the efforts my office has taken to make sure every child in Arizona is safe and secure. Of course, I cannot comment on our work with abused and neglected children because we must protect the privacy of these children and their families.

Also, I will not comment on criminal investigations for fear of jeopardizing our efforts to put criminals behind bars.

This can be frustrating for my office, for the media, and most importantly for the public.

The issue in Colorado City is first and foremost the protection of children. It is not religion or culture or lifestyle. I want to assure the people of Arizona that I will not tolerate child abuse.

No matter where it occurs, no matter who the abuser might be, I will use the resources of the AG's office to investigate and prosecute reports of child abuse and neglect to the full extent of the law. No corner of Arizona however remote is beyond reach. But neither is any corner to be singled out for prosecution. Every child in Arizona has the right to be safe and secure in Colorado City or in Tucson.

We have and will continue to look into every allegation of misconduct out of Colorado City, and will act on those we can substantiate in court.

Since taking office, we have taken many steps to protect the women and children throughout Arizona, including Colorado City. Many are unprecedented. Yesterday, members of the legislature sent me a letter encouraging me to continue vigorous efforts

in Colorado City. We share their concerns. This issue should unite Arizonans. I welcome legislative support for our efforts.

While I cannot discuss ongoing investigations or child abuse cases, I can be specific about a number steps taken to address the allegations of wrongdoing in Colorado City since last year:

- Before becoming Attorney General, I discussed Colorado City with Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff and proposed a joint meeting on the situation.
- As a result, we held the an historic summit meeting in St. George, Utah with other law enforcement officers, prosecutors, investigators, elected officials, activists, and community members.
- We worked closely with Utah Attorney General in the successful prosecution of Rodney Holm, a Hilldale law enforcement officer convicted of abuse of a minor. We learned much from this prosecution, and immediately began using this information to help with other investigations.
- I have been to Colorado City to meet with elected officials, community groups to encourage the frank reporting of any criminal activity.
- My office has investigated and charged Orson William Black, Jr. conspiracy for commit sexual conduct with a minor and sexual conduct with a minor. Mr. Black, a Colorado City resident, is currently a fugitive.
- My office has met and debriefed refugees from Colorado City – including FLDS members that have recently been recently excommunicated.
- We hired a Special Counsel for rural enforcement, who has spent much his time in Mohave County.
- My office is coordinating with Mohave County to construct a public safety facility in Colorado City. It is my hope is to have this facility up and running within the next 90 days. I'm grateful for the outstanding support from the Mohave Board of Supervisors and the Mohave County Manager this effort.
- We continue to communicate with the Mohave County Sheriff's office, which is now patrolling Colorado City daily. I applaud their commitment.
- We are maintaining constant contact with our Utah counterparts – coordinating efforts and sharing information. The border between our states no longer can serve as a refuge for law breakers.
- We have taken these steps despite having to lay off more than 50 employees last year. We continue to send staff to Colorado City to follow up on any leads of misconduct.
- Finally, my office continues to represent abused and neglected children, including children fleeing abuse in Colorado City.

**I believe we've laid the foundation that will help us better protect the residents of Colorado City. Moving forward – I plan to:**

- Continue to push for the rapid completion of the public safety facility being constructed in Colorado City and getting it staffed & operational.

- Continue to coordinate with the Mohave County Sheriff to investigate any evidence of criminal activity, and keep order in Colorado City.
- Continue to coordinate with state Child Protective Services to safeguard the health and safety of children in Colorado City.
- Continue the partnership with the Utah Attorney General's Office and coordinate our efforts to bring law breakers to justice.
- I will work with the Governor and the Arizona State Legislature to secure state laws that will make bigamy with a minor a felony offense. My office has offered three drafts of legislation. The passage of this bill is a top priority.
- Seek funding for investigators and prosecutors to address child abuse and neglect cases throughout Arizona, including Colorado City. On Friday, I testified before a joint legislative appropriations committee, where I requested the funds for additional attorneys necessary to represent children fleeing abuse and neglect. The request included \$4 million to represent **ALL** children in Arizona fleeing abuse and neglect and an additional \$1 million to handle the jury trials resulting from the CPS reforms adopted during the recent special session

Finally, to secure criminal prosecutions, to protect children, we need FACTS. I encourage anyone with a report of criminal activity to contact law enforcement or to call our office. And if anyone sees a child being abused or neglected, or if you are a child fleeing an abusive environment, please call the Child Protective Services hotline at 1-888-SOS-CHILD.

My office does not and will not tolerate child abuse. We have been, we are and we will be vigilant in prosecuting criminal behavior anywhere in Arizona.

Patience pays off. We learned this lesson recently after watching the safe return of the State Corrections officer after 15 days being held hostage by two prisoners. We can't change 50 years of mistrust overnight or in a year.

We are practicing the same patience with regard to Colorado City. Events of the distant past have made law enforcement in the Colorado City area exceptionally difficult.

I look forward to working with the governor, legislators, and concerned citizens from across Arizona to help make our state a safer place to live for both adults and children.